Writing a Personal Statement for Fellowships and Awards
Overview

• How to Prepare
• Guide to Writing
  • Content & Theme
  • Format & Style
• Tips for Success & Common Mistakes
• Evaluate
• Resources
What is a Personal Statement?

• An introduction
• A picture or a story
• A writing sample
• Evidence of knowledge
Preparation: 
Looking at You

• Unique attributes of your personal life story
• Your field of interest, why you chose it
• Personal success factors
• Goals (short and long term)
• What are you hoping to do with your education/award and how might it help you achieve your goal?
• Values, interests, and skills
Preparation: **Looking at Them**

What is the program looking for in ideal candidates?

- Carefully read about the program’s mission, vision, values, current research, faculty, curriculum, etc.
- Talk to current students/awardees who succeeded
- Speak with organization representatives about what they are seeking

What is the school/committee specifically asking for?

- **READ** the question prompts carefully and be sure to answer **EVERY** aspect of the prompt
- Discuss how you meet the specified qualifications
- Speak to how your values/goals/aspirations match those of the organization, program, and/or school
Activity!

Take a few minutes to answer the following questions:

1. What field are you currently considering?
2. Write 2-3 things that sparked your interest in your field.
3. How did you discover these things?

Find a partner and discuss your answers!
A Guide to Writing: Format & Style

Readability is key

- Use an easy-to-read and professional font
  - Size 11 or 12 with 0.5” – 1” margins
- Be mindful of word limits and page limits

Language

- Write in the first person (I/Me/My)
- Be authentic – stay away from quotes and clichés
- Develop a thesis about yourself and follow the theme throughout
A Guide to Writing: Content & Theme

• Avoid gimmicks or clichés
  • “In the matter before the court of UCLA, regarding the admission of...”
  • “I believe the children are our future!”

• Be authentic! Authenticity inspires interest
  • “My double major in Government and Women’s Studies always provokes one of two reactions...”
  • “Every morning when I wake up, the first thing I do is dance.”

• Ask yourself...
  • Are my goals clear?
  • Is my tone confident?
  • Did I use concrete examples?
What to Write?

Unstructured Prompts

“Write a personal statement consisting of 500 – 1000 words.”

Where to begin?

• Jot down some strengths, accomplishments, background, experiences, goals, etc.
• See if you notice a pattern or theme
• Start to create your “thesis statement”
• Develop an outline
• Begin free-writing
  • Try writing in 20 minute intervals, no stopping!
What to Write?

**Unstructured Prompts**

*Remember to:*

- Tell a story or review personal history (keep it recent and relevant!)
- Discuss goals & aspirations
  - What you will do with the degree/award?
- Explain what draws you to the organization
  - Think about the purpose of the program and how it will help you achieve your goals or further their cause
What to Write?
Structured Prompts

Graduate Admission – “The personal statement should address your intellectual interests, academic and professional objectives, and proposed topic(s) of graduate study.”

You may want to:

• Describe your interest in the program and the field of study
• Identify and articulate:
  o **At least one academic goal** (type of degree you want and why; faculty you want to work with, research ideas)
  o **At least one professional goal** (what you want to do after obtaining the degree)
• Discuss an idea you would like to research for your thesis/dissertation
Tips for Success

• Start early!
• Read the prompt several times before writing
• Choose a theme and provide **concrete** examples that illustrate your point
• Be unique
• Write about what *you* like
• Introduce skills and show evidence that supports them
• Revise, revise, revise
Common Errors

• Using the phrase “I’ve always wanted to be…”
• Criticizing others
• Discussing your background without relating it to your current goal
• Avoid unnecessary capitalizations
• Embellishing/being untruthful
• An autobiography or retelling of your resume
Evaluate: Revising Your Drafts

Strategically choose people to critique your personal statement

- Begin with a trusted friend to clean up language and grammar
- Stop by The Career Center for help from a Career Advisor
- Take it to a professor in the field you are applying for
- Utilize services offered by the Office of Graduate Fellowships and Awards
- Pass it on to people who are writing your recommendations
Evaluate:

Check the details

• Is the name of the school/program/committee correct?
• Do you have the correct number of pages/words? Not too few or too many!
• Check for typos!
• Save & submit it as a PDF when possible.
Let’s Practice!

Explain how you think you contribute to the Mission Statement of the Fellows Society.

• To recognize and advance academic excellence at the graduate level by developing leadership skills.
• To promote exchange and interactions among fellows from multiple disciplines.
• To encourage service to the University and Community and to develop an interdisciplinary network of scholars.
Drop-In Career Advising

Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Extended Tuesday hours, 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.
(Fall and Spring semesters only)
Closed Fridays, 1:30 - 2:30 p.m. (Fall semester only)
Professional Clothing Closet

Students can obtain FREE professional and business casual attire appropriate for:

• Career Fairs
• Interviews
• Internships
• The workplace

View hours of operation at career.fsu.edu/ClothingCloset
The Career Center

Located in the Dunlap Success Center at the corner of Learning Way and Woodward Avenue.

100 South Woodward Avenue, Tallahassee, FL 32306
Connect with us!

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